

La Pazzia

Max, Bronson, and some comrades from the Patients' Council waylaid guests outside the cafeteria and handed them little slips of paper on which had been printed the following message: If you oppose spending 90 Gs on the MERGER NIGHT ASYLUM BALL to which WE WERE NOT INVITED, then sign our petition. Everyone immediately threw them away.

They littered the entrance: little green half-page sized pieces of paper printed on an office photocopier.

A fight nearly broke out, a square-jawed expensively tailored man shaking his meaty fist in the face of the chairman of the Patient's Council: Dr. Praetorius, who had been placed in charge of the new Minsistry of Asylums and Casinos.

Vixen Foxy Weasel-Theatre arrived wearing a sombrero, a wide industrial-strength leather belt, and twenty pounds of Mexican silver.

The highlight of the evening was supposed to be a series of tableaux vivants from Max the Butcher's delightfully nostalgic memoir, Never Had it So Good: Patient Life at Thing Street Asylum.

Instead it was a wonderfully graphic dramatization of Joseph Workman's The Wonderful Post-Mortem, a translation and adaptation of Professor Tebaldi's Ragione e Pazzia originally published in The Canada Lancet 22.2:33-6 (October, 1889).

An enormous figure wrapped in newsprint appeared on the mezzanine and started to harangue the guests.



**La Pazzia:
The Wonderful Post-Mortem
(A Masque of Mental Health)**

Translated and Adapted from Prof. Tebaldi's
Ragione e Pazzia
by
Dr. Joseph Workman

Originally Published
in
The Canada Lancet 22.2: 33-6 {October, 1889}

Finding and Adaptation for the Stage
by
Johnny Boy

Dramatis Personae

- 1) "La Pazzia" or Divine Madness
- 2) Mental Health
- 3) Dr. Joseph Workman
- 4) Clever Young Doctor (Dr. Workman in his Youth)
- 5) Clever Young Students
- 6) A Mythical Figure or "Shaman"
- 7) A Sexton
- 8) Time

Various "Bit Parts": The Human Heart, The Brain, A Voice, etc.

Notes on Production

The centre of the stage is occupied by a large arm-chair, occupied by a character who says nothing but sits and reads for the duration of the play. This character represents "doctors in general," and Dr. Workman himself.

On the left of this seated character is a lectern, at which stands the figure of Divine Madness. She wears a very elegant dress, covered until the end of the play by a dark cloak or gown. She reads throughout the play. Note that while her part is large, it does not have to be memorized, except for the few sentences at the very end, when she leaves the lectern to sit lean on Dr. Workman's chair.

On the right of this seated character is a table which serves as a "dissection" area. The figure of Mental Health stands near this table. On and around this table, Mental Health and other actors mime the words of Divine Madness.

The following items will be needed for the mime: a whig, a bathing cap, a styrofoam head or brain, a plastic saw, a heart-shaped box, gowns for the Young Doctor and his students, etc.

The mime could be improvised by a number of volunteers, and might be a good opportunity for some of the staff of the Centre to perform.

The most important actors are Divine Madness, Mental Health, the Young Doctor, and Dr. Workman himself. Note that, depending on the wishes of the Director, it would be possible to dispense with an actor for Dr. Workman, and substitute an empty chair or a portrait instead.

Note that while as a "post-mortem" this play might at first seem slightly morbid, the whole point of it seems to be that the phenomena of life elude explanation and death by virtue of a mysterious power of infinite variety and change. This power is "La Pazzia" or Divine Madness.

A Possible Introduction.

Dr. Joseph Workman was born near Lisburn, Ireland, in 1805 and died in Toronto in 1894. He came to Canada in 1829, taught school for a time in Montreal, obtained his medical degree from McGill College in 1835, and moved to Toronto in 1836. After a number of years running the family hardware business, he returned to medical practice in 1847 and taught obstetrics and therapeutics in the Toronto School of Medicine. From 1853-75 he was Medical Superintendent of the Provincial Lunatic Asylum, Toronto. Contemporary biographers remark his "literary turn of mind." Nonetheless, while Workman's career is occasionally discussed in an article of the "pioneers of medicine" school, or in a chapter of an unpublished doctoral dissertation, his writings have been virtually ignored.

This is especially unfortunate given the interesting light they cast on the evolution of Workman's attitude to insanity. The thesis, expressed in some (now-dated) doctoral dissertations and articles, that Workman approached mental illness as an essentially physiological disorder, or that he "dismissed the long list of supposed 'moral' agencies to which asylum superintendents in the early part of the nineteenth century had assigned causal primacy" (Tom Brown, *Living with God's Afflicted: A History of the Provincial Lunatic Asylum at Toronto*, 166; unpublished ph.d. dissertation, Queen's U, 1980), obviously needs revision.

All his life Joseph Workman sought the answer to unanswerable questions. Here he translates a work which mocks the arrogance that assumes that one

can ever find such answers. Something he thinks his colleagues could learn a lot from.

Note that in his long lifetime Dr. Workman dissected hundreds of cadavers, male and female alike, but the object of this post-mortem is deliberately female, because it stands for things traditionally associated with women: the muses, genius, and the soul. We leave it to you to decide what it stands for exactly.

Dr. Workman must have delighted, in the last years of his life, in satirizing, in this Wonderful Post-Mortem, the futility of looking for truth where it cannot be found, while not looking at it where it already is. We hope you like it too.]

The stage is dark. In the middle is a large chair in which an old man, Dr. Joseph Workman himself, sits reading by the light of a single lamp. On the table beside him are a flask of brandy, several glasses, cigars and cigarettes.

Male Voice: I would like to answer a question which is frequently heard by alienists. Do we find the organic changes of our subjects any which may account for the numerous and varied forms of mental disorders? Is there a material structural alteration of the brain, which should explain the strange manifestations of insanity?

As the voice speaks, Dr. Workman adjusts himself accordingly. An old professor, whose hairs had become silvered in the study of insanity, and who was accustomed to long vigils whilst poring over questions of science, was one night overtaken by drowsiness; he placed his head against the back of his chair, and closed his eyes, to get a little repose.

At this point, a shrouded figure to Dr. Workman's left, Divine Madness, mimes the speaker's words. She carries a scroll, and

discreetly deposits it on the corner of Dr. Workman's table. Divine Madness returns to her former place, as the voice speaks.

When he awoke he found on his table a letter; it showed no post-stamp; it was strangely addressed, a little in one direction and a little in another, partly in small characters, and partly in large, with some hieroglyphics interposed; it was just one of those to which alienistic physicians are accustomed, and thus it read:

Divine Madness: [With a florid gesture.] My dear and good Doctor! A sentiment of profound gratitude, to which I am not a stranger, my respect for the untiring kindness which you lavish on your patients, and the desire to explain an occurrence which has caused so much noise, have induced me to address to you this letter.

I know that the sedate and tranquil minds of [Doctors] of this celebrated [Mental Health Centre], as well as a few of the [Provincial Authorities], have been much disturbed by the fact of the disappearance of the body of a woman from the School of Anatomy; here I am to explain the secret, and by so doing I hope to quiet the minds of all those gentlemen.

You know who I am, and you will well remember that, whilst I was your clinical guest, you made a world of enquiries in order to know me thoroughly. My genealogy was traced back to its most remote source, and it was discovered that I descended from a merry and thoughtless god.

A little mime on Dr. Workman's right. A very modern looking female actor, in T-shirt and tights, as Mental Health. She is examined by a busy doctor with a clipboard and a genealogical chart. They continue to mime the words of Divine Madness.

My features were studied as earnestly as those of a lover; my body was subjected to a thousand examinations and experiments, poked, punched and peered into in every part; convulsed by electricity when I was quiet; restrained in a camisole with long, closed sleeves, when I became too lively.

By now Mental Health is in a strait-jacket. Restrained as she is, the Young Doctor begins to give her too many pills. Divine Madness continues.

My inward parts were no less annoyed, for I swallowed as many pills and decoctions as might have terrified a hypochondriac.

Mental health begins to reel around the stage.

At last I was one day believed to be dead --

Mental Health collapses on stage. The Young Doctor nudges her with the toe of his boot. She does not move. The Young Doctor shrugs and goes away.

And I hoped now to have peace, but I was disappointed.

Divine Madness now becomes very mysterious.

I must, distinguished doctor, make to you, in strict confidence, a confession, without which you could not comprehend the mystery. You must not regard me as the equal of any of the other afflicted ones who have the good fortune to be under your care; I am a privileged being!

A Mythical Figure, dressed possibly as a Native Shaman, approaches the reclining figure of Mental Health. Mythical Figure performs a ritual ceremony as Divine Madness speaks.

When I was yet in baby swathing, a genius came to my cradle, and bestowed on me some whimsical caresses, and placing her hand on my tender forehead, she pronounced nearly these words, which have proved prophetic; "Live, dear child, as long as humanity shall endure, and every individual who shall look upon you, or shall touch the hem of your vestment, or possess a lock of your hair, shall derive something from you, and transmit it to most distant generations. The spirit shall animate every part of your body, so that, even when detached from all

the others, it shall still have sense and consciousness, and by its own proper virtue it shall tend to reunite with them."

Mythical Figure departs.

Here I now am to prove the truth of [these words], by relating to you, in length and breadth, all that happened to me whilst I appeared to be dead!

More doctors and nurses in white coats appear at the back of the hall and parade onto the stage, carrying sheets, saws, hammers, butcher knives, a large box labelled "SPARE PARTS." They are led by the Young Doctor, wearing a blood-splattered gown. They mime as Divine Madness speaks.

You had just pronounced the fatal word, "MORTA," when I felt the white sheet drawn over my face.

One of the Doctors places a white sheet over the face of Mental Health.

Then ... with but little politeness they denuded me; they lifted me up, and then let me drop into a box, but not without paying a compliment to my body, which, as a handsome female, I accepted with gratification, though I was obliged to appear dead.

They lift mental health and roughly drop her on a table to Dr. Workman's right. Wolf whistles all around.

I passed into the hands of a man who was still more rude than [the others]; this fellow was the grave-digger; with the assistance of another he lifted me out of the box, raised me high up, and let me plump down on a hard cold stone table, that would have made any creature shiver.

The Student Doctors gather around the Young Doctor. Pushing and shoving. Nudging and winking. Some of the students are tipling on the sly. Others are obviously cracking risque jokes.

Now began a strange exhibition. All around, on the seats of an amphitheatre, were stretched a hundred young fellows, some of whom were near to me, and you, dear Professor, were among these; the others were higher up and more distant. Oh! how many eyes were fixed on my members, which I, through all my life had so modestly guarded, excepting on occasions in which I was rather discreet. How many complimentary epigrams did I hear!

The Young Doctor puts on a pair of strange glasses. He begins to examine the brain of Mental Health.

One long, lean gentleman, with a thin gray beard below the chin, and a pair of spectacles on his nose (he was very like you, [Dr. Workman], and wearing a long, black, glossy cloak, came near where my head was placed on a wooden pillow.

The Young Doctor removes a large saw from the "SPARE PARTS" box, and begins to remove the skull of Mental Health.

An iron hand squeezed my face and pressed it against the hard cushion; I then heard a sharp blade running round my head, from which the hair was removed, and the skin was cut down to the bone.

The Young Doctor removes a whig from the "SPARE PARTS" box and flings it onto the floor.

Next I heard the scalp leaving the skull, with a sort of rustle, very like that given by my silk dress when I used to attire myself for a ball.

Rustling noises. The Young Doctor removes a plastic bathing cap from the "SPARE PARTS" box and throws it onto the floor.

I did not feel the least pain, and I listened with curiosity to what the [Young Doctor] was saying to one of those young students, who had come beside me, and from time to time rested his writing board on my abdomen, with very little respect, if I must tell the truth.

One of the student doctors rests his clipboard on the stomach of Mental Health.

They now, with a saw, removed the upper half of the cranium. When the Professor uncovered the brain, there was a general movement of curiosity.

The Young Doctor throws the top of a styrofoam head on the floor.

All eyes, armed with magnifying glasses, were turned to this organ, which, being very carefully raised out of its shell, was placed on a weighing scale.

The Young Doctor, assisted by his students, begins to weigh the lower portion of the styrofoam head with the sort of scale that one finds in a grocery store.

[With obvious pride.] And when the Professor announced the weight of it, there was an exclamation of general astonishment, for it exceeded not only the average of that of the brain of woman, but even that ascribed to the brain of man!

The Young Doctor holds up the styrofoam brain on its grocery-store scale.

The students ogle it. Ohs and ahs.

They now began to slice the brain, but I did not lose a bit of my consciousness or my finest senses. I heard the Professor at every cut uttering his remarks, which were spiced with strange words, such as the topography of the brain abounds in.

Here it would be possible to insert of voice-over using some of Dr. Workman's own "Pathological Notes." For example:

On dividing the dura mater, a large encysted deposit of blood coagulum, with some discoloured serum, was found

covering the entire superior surface of the left cerebral hemisphere, and extending downwards over the inferior surface of the middle lobe.... In fact, the brain, now freed from its encumbrance, presented not a vestige of disease, excepting a few spots of meningeal adhesion. [Dr. Joseph Workman, "Notes Illustrative of the Pathology of Insanity," American Journal of Insanity 17.1 (1860-61): 7-8]

His observations invariably ended -- all normal!

The Young Doctor is seen shaking his head, perplexed.

I felt the knife running over my breast and abdomen, and then, after learned cuts and tearings, a hand grasped my heart, raised it out of its mysterious nook, and carried it to the light of day.

The Young Doctor removes a heart-shaped box of chocolates from the "SPARE PARTS" box, and holds it up.

Some of the students now lighted their cigars; the smoke of tobacco has indeed its place in the dramas of the heart; why then should it not honor its dissection? The odor of my internal parts perhaps disturbed the olfactories of these genteel youths: --alas, what a metamorphosis of matter!

The students are seen lighting the Young Doctor's cigar.

My heart, as a dethroned sovereign, was laid on my breast; the point of the knife was pushed into it, and it was split open in two or three directions.

The students open the heart-shaped box of chocolates and share the contents.

I tell you truthfully that these wounds, inflicted on the dearest of my organs, were the only ones that made me feel a sort of thrill; but I found

comfort in the thought that the treasure had long ago been removed from its shrine; the sought the prize in any empty casket. Sentiments, affections, passions, emotions, ravings, all its tumultuous array, I had given over the custody of other keepers

I was hoping that this entertainment had closed, when I was put to a fresh trial. The Professor, having cut off a little slice of my brain, put it between two glasses, and placed it under a lens which magnified enormously.

The Young Doctor removes a toy microscope from the box of "SPARE PARTS" and examines a piece of chocolate.

"Behold," I heard him proclaim, "a nervous cell!"

An actor dressed up as a "nervous cell" or carrying a large poster of an amoeba, leaps up from behind the table and runs screaming from the stage.

And all those gentlemen, one by one, looked at it, but on finishing I thought I heard them say to themselves, --"we knew all that before."

The students pretend to be unimpressed.

After this the [Doctor] turned round to his scholars, and with much solemnity declared: --that as no special lesion was found, to which death could be ascribed, they must hold that the cause of this patient's death must have been paralysis of the heart.

The Young Doctor is seen to be speaking, his students nodding in agreement. All look very self-satisfied.

I laughed in all the little bits into which they had divided my poor body.

Mental Health is seen covering her mouth with her hand. A figure dressed up as Time enters the auditorium, beating a gong. The Young Doctor and his students prepare to go. The Young

Doctor hangs his blood-stained gown on the coat-rack beside the table. They leave. The sexton remains.

A stroke of the bell emptied the amphitheatre; the sexton remained, and smoking the stump of a cigar, a muttering with a monotonous cadence a vulgar jest, threw my ill-used members into the casket.

The sexton throws the body-parts (the whip, the bathing cap, the styrofoam brain, etc.) into the "SPARE PARTS" box.

He then poured water over the stone table, to make it ready for another dissection; after which he took off his black, blood-stained tunic, and with his wonted refrain and the last puff of smoke, he went out of the school.

Exit the sexton.

A profound silence now reigned in that chamber of death, when every part of my body, seized by the force of affinity, moved towards those which had been its neighbors during life, and in a short time I felt myself re-made.

Mental Health stirs on the table.

In a short time I felt myself re-made; the edges of the wounds of the heart were united; it commenced to beat, and the blood again flowed through the most distant windings of the vessels. As if awaking from a fearful dream, I raised my head and looked around, and hearing no sound I arose from that dread repository and proceeded to the door.

Mental Health rises, walks over to the "SPARE PARTS" box and peers inside. Mental Health touches the relevant parts of her body as Divine Madness talks.

I was naked, and I must cover myself with something; it would have made a devil of a row, and they would have shut me up again in the asylum if I had gone out in that state; and yet those young fellows had seen and examined me from head to feet; so I took down from its peg

your black gown and put it on me; I put a white covering on my head, and then I went forth from that place which I shall never be able to forget.

Mental Health removes the Young Doctor's gown from the coat-rack, and puts it on. She looks around her, then exits through the auditorium door. Divine Madness is now alone on stage with Dr. Workman, who is still reading the long letter, and sipping his brandy.

Once outside, I became mistress of myself; I went around, as is now my custom, among the people; to-day I walk in professional vestments, which suit me just as well as any other, in which I disguise and conceal --

Divine Madness begins to loosen the dark gown which she has been wearing till now. On the next word she lets it fall to the floor.

MYSELF!

Spotlight on Divine Madness who is now seen to wearing a beautiful, sequined gown. She looks a bit like MAE WEST.

You have now, my dear Doctor Workman, the story of the post-mortem of a living woman!

She walks over to Dr. Workman, who has finally finished reading the letter. Dr. Workman is holding a snifter of brandy. He puts down the snifter, and in his left hand raises a large lighter, preparing to smoke his cigar. By now Divine Madness is leaning over his chair.

You may be grateful to me for the secret, as I am to you for all the kindness lavished on me by you, and for all the experiments made on my body both in life and supposed death.

By now Divine Madness is perched on an arm of Dr. Workman's chair, though he does not appear to notice, still thinking of lighting his cigar. Divine Madness reaches over to the table, and takes a cigarette.

I do not kiss your hand, fearing that I might thus infect you with a little of my own --

Dr. Workman flicks his lighter. A large flame.

Whimsicality!

Dr. Workman proceeds to light his cigar, keeping the flame very still.

But I make you a low courtesy.

Divine Madness stoops just a little, to light her cigarette from Dr. Workman's flame.

And I hope to see you soon again, in some new and interesting resemblance.

Divine Madness takes a long drag on her cigarette. Exhaling she blows out the flame, leaving Dr. Workman in deep shadow. A single small spotlight glitters on her diamonds.

Continue to me that friendship which was so great a favor to me, and which shall never be forgotten by your most devoted --

A brief pause as she raises her arm in a magnificent gesture, before shouting.

MADNESS!

A brief moment of intense light on the statuesque figure of Divine Madness. Then....

In a party-piece or (more likely) after-dinner talk, Wrinkles in Ancient Asylum Reports, Clark satirizes the recent past of asylum doctoring as ancient Egyptian history. He facetiously suggests that the Pyramids were intended as hospitals for the insane. These Ancient Egyptians wrapped their dead Pharaohs in annual reports.

The piece was read at the forty-third annual meeting of the Association of Medical Superintendents of American Institutions for the the Insane, held at Newport, R.I., June 18-20, 1880. Clark targets such topical issues as restraint, patrongage, the cooking of statistics to produce artificially low cure rates, the sensationalism of the press, and even the surgical mutilation of women as practiced by colleagues like R.M. Bucke at the London Asylum:

It was also to be expected in that age of divisional medicine that the useful uterus and its appendages should be chargeable with being a prolific cause of insanity Were these detached laboratories even slightly diseased then was the excision declared to be a triumph of medical foresight and skill: were they healthy then was it a good riddance to cut out these supernumeraries. In that barbarous age it was not thought barbarous to unsex the many for the problematic benefit of the few. (9)

They had strong stomachs.

Giffer Gibbon puked during the performance and Professor Lamprinil had to take him home just when he wanted to rub shoulders with Praetorius's gabardine suit. He himself wore combat fatigues, as usual.

Trixie offered the press yet another statement....

The whole thing was just a big mistake....

After it was all over and Johnny had worked so hard, hauling all those easels back to the paint store, there was a tin of spray-glue from Sylvia waiting for him on the desk, to exchange at the hardware store. He left the change on the table.

It was the last thing he did for her.

The Evening News of November 16, 1886 published the story of Alice Bedson's liaison. A large one-word headline on page one shouted

Infamous!

It was followed by a series of small-type, but equally melodramatic phrases:

A Terrible Crime Brought

**to
Light
A Scoundrel Takes Advantage
of a
Girl's Madness
and
Criminally Assaults Her
in the
Asylum,
She Bears a Child
and
Makes a Confession,
and
Arrest of the Alleged
Author
of her
Ruin.**

He loved that word asylum. Thing Street had been officially called that for only the first 50 years of its existence and subsequently, because of the word's negative connotations, had been euphemistically designated a hospital. But the old word indelibly marked the place, even after the building had been destroyed. It could not be effaced, with almost as strong positive as negative connotations. The latter were certainly very strong. It was good to offer asylum, terrible to impose it. Etc., etc.

Virtual was equally loaded. It suggested illusoriness, as well as ideality. The ideality of Virtual Asylum was implicit in the notion of community mental health, a complicated abstract infrastructure of services and resources that was supposed to do everything and more that the old asylum of bricks and mortar did. Its illusoriness was apparent in the grim realities of Thing Street. It had everything to do with that loaded word and totally nebulous idea, deinstitutionalization. Etc., etc.

Dr. Posh rolled the proposal tightly in his bejeweled fingers and cracked it on his knee. Now, the first word.

Asylum.

Why asylum?

The Mental Health Centre was that for only the first fifty years. Wasn't that rather negative? He disliked the connotations.

Those quotations.

The one from Daniel Clark at the end. Changes are not always improvements. That's negative. It suggested the original asylum was a good thing.

The one by Marion. Had I a sparrows wings, I would fly, fly away from Thing Street Asylum. It suggested the asylum was a bad place. He was confused.

Max suggested that these things were mere titles and captions. They could be changed. He had changed the title of his thesis a dozen times.

But they're important, insisted Dr. Posh. Like the opening chords of Beethoven's fifth symphony. Tralala-LAH!

He stretched his flashing fingers way out in front of his face. Playing his air piano. Like Svengali.

After all, he was a shrink.

The half life-size statue of Wagner studied them from its alcove beside the baby grand piano. Arms folded. Jaw set. Behind him the sky blushed pink unobstructed by buildings. Thirty floors above Boy Street they could not hear the traffic....

Asylum!

In the elevator they had to swallow hard to repressurize. Or maybe it was only their imagination. What difference would it have made if their brains had imploded....

While the authorities used terms like asylum, hospital, clinic, reception hospital, Poor Man's Sanatorium, etc., the patients saw the Asylum less positively, and more inventively, as a living tomb, an especially long drawn-out kind of murder, a fourth-rate hotel run by sadistic scullery maids, a brothel for Government Bonded White Slaves, Ontario Hospital Hell, etc....

The cops booked Johnny for vandalism. He told the judge he lost control when somebody answered the phone. It cost him twenty-five cents, a third of his total assets.

Porko attended a special session of Night Court. He listened with satisfaction as Vixen Foxy Weasel-Theatre pronounced sentence, in black-face

I been following this narrative for years, awaiting Judgment Day.

Your latest cynical communiques provide me with just such an opportunity.

I find totally preposterous, your demand that Thing Street's great liberal theosophist, the Benefactor of Mad Kind, C. Lamprini Eel, PAY you for your WORK.

This exaggerated sense of entitlement proceeds from a foregone conclusion, that you should be suffered to exist. That has not proven to be the case.

Based on the evidende before me [fart!], I am not inclined to believe that your rights have been violated, or indeed that you have any.

Love,
"Foxy"

The judge recommended a psychiatric examination, by C. Lamprini Eel, Ph.D., following a private session in her chambers during which Johnny Boy would be invited to slake his appetite for HOT FOOD by EATING her TWAT.